

TET SHIPWRECK, VIETNAM - PRELIMINARY REPORT

The Tet Shipwreck was discovered by a fisherman in an initially undisclosed location in Vietnam just before Tet in 2009 (Tet is the Vietnamese lunar New Year, which occurred in late January 2009). Later reports indicated that the wrecksite was located somewhere between Phu Quoc Island and two or three kilometers from mainland Cambodia at a depth of approximately 20 meters. No further information is presently available with respect to the location of this wrecksite.

Initially the salvaged material was confined to Chinese ceramics dated to the second half of 15th century - Tianshun period (1457 to 1464) to Chenghua period (1465 to 1487) wares, along with three Thai Sisatchanalai celadon figurines and a celadon plate. The very limited amount of Chinese ceramics recovered included approximately 50 Longquan celadon bowls with various motifs including flower, bird, and deer (the latter on only one bowl) - see Photo for Ceramics Catalogue Number M-408 below for an example of the bowls.



One celadon jar with incised floral décor was also recovered with an approximate height of 28 centimeters. A single blue and white plate was found as well with a *qilin* in the central medallion surrounded by lappets and cross-hatching at the rim, 33 centimeters in diameter approximately. The large and rather unique Thai celadon figurines recovered were an elephant with attendants positioned at each leg and two more mounted on its back, approximately 22 centimeters in height; a horse with mounted rider, approximately 28 centimeters in

height; and a horse with a standing attendant, approximately 26 centimeters in height. The Thai celadon plate had incised accents with foliated rim and was approximately 30 centimeters in diameter. Also recovered was a single blue and white six centimeter square-shaped jarlet in typical 14th century Yuan style with chrysanthemum sprays on each side. The two horizontal loop handles of the jarlet had a flaming pearl opposite one handle and a *lingzhi* fungus opposite the other. The attribution of the jarlet was confirmed by firsthand examination by this writer, which very convincingly revealed that all its salient characteristics were unmistakably Yuan period. This jarlet had been promptly purchased by a Vietnamese collector who quite understandably understood the rareness and desirability of the item. The presence of heirloom or antique ceramics in a ship's cargo, as in the case of this Yuan jarlet, has been encountered in a number of other instances: the Sinan shipwreck found off of South Korea (dated to the 14th century - also included 12th century Korean ceramics [3] in its cargo), the Brunei shipwreck (dated to the late 15th to early 16th century also included 2 Yuan ceramics - a gourd shaped ewer and a small blue and white jar), and the Pandanan shipwreck discovered in the Philippines (dated to the mid 15th century - also contained 4 Yuan ceramics, which included a couple of small yingqing gourd shaped ewers).

Subsequent to these initial findings limited amounts of further recoveries were made including Chinese blue and white wares along with Thai ceramics and a very small quantity of Vietnamese wares. The Chinese Jingdezhen blue and white porcelains recovered totaled approximately 300 items and included bowls, jarlets and plates. The majority of the small bowls and all the jarlets had unglazed bases, with the latter also being devoid of footrim. A few of the small bowls did have lightly glazed or fully glazed bases. The bowls were of small, medium and large size with approximate diameters of 8.5 centimeters, 15 centimeters, and 35 centimeters and with the principal décor including flowers, aquatic plants, and the three friends of winter motif (pine, bamboo and prunus). Many of the small bowls (examples of

which are in Photos M-411 & M-414 below) were adorned with an underglaze blue character in the central medallion including the Chinese character *fu* (福 - good fortune), and a Tibetan *lanca* character - both characters framed by a double line border.



The Chinese blue and white jarlets recovered were of globular and ovoid shape in small and medium size ranging in diameter from 5.5 centimeters to 9 centimeters with the décor including lotus and fruit sprays as shown in Photos M-410 & M-416 further below. Plates consisted of small, medium and large sizes with approximate diameters of 14.5 centimeters, 30 to 35 centimeters, and 57 centimeters and with the principal décor including flowers, frolicking boys, a lion, and a qilin (refer to Photos for M-412 below). A single plate or charger in the largest size (diameter of 57 centimeters) was recovered containing a floral motif. A very large monochrome white jar approximately 80 centimeters in height completely intact and with shiny lustrous glaze was also reportedly recovered. Also recovered was a very limited quantity of kendis, some of which contained underglaze blue characters on the base. In addition to the above Chinese blue and white material there were reports of approximately 200 blue and white plates, also from this shipwreck, being offered on the market in Phnom Penh for US\$ 2,000 each. The plates were primarily 30 to 33 centimeters in diameter with a floral décor, but did include a few with a lion motif. In addition, a few of the plates were of smaller size, 20 to 22 centimeters diameter, and all decorated with a lion motif.



Thai material recovered included Sisatchanalai celadon jars (13 to 14.2 centimeters high) with attractive light turquoise blue glaze and of extended ovoid shape with a cup-like mouth, two loop handles, and narrow vertical grooves carved from shoulder to just above the foot (refer to Photos TH-481 & TH-493 below); plates with foliated rim and incised onion skin motif approximately 30 centimeters in diameter; and celadon bowls - some with incised floral décor, diameter of about 12 centimeters (see Photo TH-477). Recovered as well were Sisatchanalai brown glazed wares including small gourd shaped jarlets (Photo TH-485 below), brown glazed potiches with covers approximately 10 centimeters high (see Photos for TH-490), and ovoid shape jars around 18 cm. high (Photos for TH-483). Bottle vases, brown glazed and celadon glazed, of extended ovoid shape with a cup-like mouth with rolled rim flanked by two vertical loop handles were also found, as well as earthenware kendis and underglaze black decorated cover boxes (small, medium and large). The predominant decoration of the cover boxes is a vine scroll and cross-hatched diaper motif with the treatment of the covers including a lotus bud knob, mangosteen fruit stalk handle, and plain center (refer to Photos for

TH-482 below). Also salvaged were storage jars with horizontal loop handles primarily in medium and large size with dark brown and blackish brown glaze from the Singburi kilns.



The very small amount of Vietnamese material was confined to blue and white jarlets and vases, 15 centimeters and 27 centimeters in height, with floral décor, along with small polychrome floral decorated jarlets (Photos for V-261 included below).



The Tet shipwreck contained an interesting and instructive assortment of Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese ceramics. The Longquan celadons

were particularly impressive with their finely incised motifs and exquisite tone of glaze. The large and rather unique Thai celadon figurines of an elephant with attendants, a horse with mounted rider, and a horse with a standing attendant were also noteworthy. The material salvaged from the wreck did not include any Sukhothai wares, and this also is significant and instructive. Unfortunately, in the absence of any controlled scientific investigation of the wrecksite additional valuable information has been lost for study and research purposes.

Notes:

1) Detailed Descriptions of each individual Tet Shipwreck ceramic referenced above, along with others from the wreck, are included in the **Ceramics Catalogue** in the corresponding ceramic category (Ming, Thai, Viet). Details include the Catalogue Number, description, size, dating, provenance (origin, place and date of acquisition, cost), and any references to comparable examples.

2) Additionally, Photos of each ceramic (including the base) are also included in the **Shipwrecks - Photos Folder** for the Tet Shipwreck.

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Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter, Volume VII Number 3, February - May 2014, "Preliminary Report - Tet Shipwreck, Vietnam," page 2.



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